Can the potential of Africa become unlocked by 2050?

Why is a thriving Africa critical to the future?

Consider the modern history of Africa. Over the past 50 years alone, the continent has faced geopolitical clashes, wars, famines, genocides, disease pandemics in the midst of systematic tensions. Think of the missed opportunities, the squandered potential, the harm and devastation. In the midst of this trying and troubled timeline, hope is in not lost completely. Think of the entrepreneurial ventures, the growing human rights efforts, and the humanitarian and healthcare advances of recent years. Now, think to the future. A future with a thriving Africa affords continental opportunities but also open doors for unprecedented global collaborations.

With the abundant African population growing to nearly 2.5 billion individuals by 2050 and diverse mineral wealth throughout the continent, the possibility to unlock untapped potential in the next 30 years exists. Two themes that are significant for leaders working to unlock the continent's potential include leveraging the abundant human talent and also preparing for disruptive climate change. In the midst of dystopian narratives and doomsday stories of the future, leaders must remind themselves that futures of thriving and potential are possible, even if they are not yet achieved.

Africa finds itself currently as, geographically speaking, the shining star of what is known as the non-integrated gap. In simplistic terms, this means that, excluding the country of South Africa, Africa's presence in the 21st century world clamors for a miraculous peace, overall security, and an end to combat. Contemporary influences actively harnessing the minds and reshaping the decisions of leaders throughout Africa are the African Union and African Rising movement. Important themes that arise from these influences in Africa include intra-continental cooperation and local entrepreneurship. Consider the unleashed security and economic benefits that these themes offer the African people. Imagine a thriving Africa that provides the world with leaders who are peacebuilders, leaders who embody cooperation and collaboration, and leaders who embrace thriving.

Africa is currently floundering in challenges associated with lackluster infrastructure, food instability, and water insecurity. Systemically, the continent lacks the physical infrastructure, with 620 million individuals living without electricity. Basic infrastructure challenges critically influence the dire food and water scarcities that define much of life intra-continentally. In a continent where 70% of individuals believe religion is very important, values influence the conflicts associated with tribalism, non-state actors, and religious contentions. Leaders must prepare for the burdens of unprecedented droughts and floods radiating throughout the continent due to disruptive climate change. The list only continues. Overcoming these challenges is a duty for leaders who envision a future where Africa is thriving and contributing at the global level.

Africa could hold an influential role on the world stage in 2050. Today's leaders must recognize how present decisions are actively - whether directly or indirectly - impacting the future. Current events and decisions are already shaping 2050. Within Africa, consider the lasting impact of civil conflicts between people groups and shifting forms of government within African countries. From an international perspective, consider the impact of the unprecedented foreign funding, specifically from Chinese investors. The African people represent more than a number. They represent a diverse cultural tapestry, an unrivaled human development opportunity, the largest global workforce, and new thought contributors. In addition to human capital, Africa offers the world rich natural resources including oil and gas. These resources already catch the attention of international players through the recent manufacturing revolution and pharmaceutical production influx. As the earth faces disruptive climate change in the coming decades, the natural resources found in Africa will strongly influence both state and non-state decisions. From an altruistic perspective, a thriving Africa is essential to the global citizenry in 2050.

Africa has moved beyond simply surviving and toward rising. In the coming decades, Africa once again has an opportunity – an opportunity to move beyond rising toward thriving. Thriving not only allows for Africa to flourish but allows for Africa to help the world flourish. This is a heavy call on the shoulders of leaders guiding this continent that is home to a complex tapestry of nations, tribes, religions, and languages.

Why might it beneficial to leverage talent in Africa?

In leadership and management circles, the term talent is associated with the aptitude, skills, and competencies of a workforce. And, collectively speaking, the year 2050 will see no shortage of talent in Africa. The culturally rich continent is projected to claim 25% of the global population in that year. The sheer volume of the talent serves as a critical and dramatic driver of change for a continent seeking to flourish in the next three decades.

When thinking of talent, African leaders may choose to embrace a strengths-based perspective. Leaders who embrace this perspective recognize that their collective workforce resembles the composition of strengths from the group. By relying on the principles of humanism, strengths-based leaders recognize that all individuals have unique value; and when used appropriately, their value betters themselves and the group.

A strategic way for a group to evolve over time is by investing in talent. One approach available to African leaders is to 1) craft a vision for a desired future, 2) recognize the strengths of their collective workforce, and 3) identify ways to develop the talent to align with the desired future. Alignment, in this sense, allows for greater potential. Leveraging talent is essential for any group working towards a long-term vision - such as unlocking African potential by 2050. Benefits of talent development include unravelling new thought patterns, an influx of collaboration, an increase in alternative solutions, additional skills afforded to the group, and

unlocking unknown potential. Consider the unforeseen flourishing that may arise as African thinking infiltrates the liberal democracies and autocratic systems present within much of the developed world.

Empowerment is strongly linked to development. Currently, sub-Saharan Africa holds the title for highest out-of-school rates of children through to secondary school in the world. 2050 welcomes an era where the majority of students will have access to, be enrolled in, and actively participating in education – whether in person, online, or a hybrid approach to schooling. Shifts toward greater gender equality offer a powerful force. Gender equality will impact education access as well as shift African family life. Consider the importance of empowerment to help combat rising inequality while encouraging social stability across a geography marked with notable tribalism and inter-group contention. As the Africa Rising movement continues to gain momentum and propel the continent forward, African empowerment may be shaped by influences such as persistence, endurance, diversity, cultural richness, a shared history, and more. The unique shared experience through the Africa Rising movement offers the world a new take on empowerment that is unprecedented to human civilization.

To unlock this potential by 2050, the future must evolve past the countervailing pressures that have stunted growth over the centuries. In the past fifty years alone, consider events plaguing Africa including the Ethiopian famine of 1980s, the Rwandan massacre of the 1990s, the Sudanese civil war of the 2000s as well as the Ebola outbreak and the HIV epidemic. A mixture of intra-continental forces along with monumental foreign forces, racism, and corruption have restricted Africa from truly flourishing.

Shifting is happening and will continue to happen as African talent advances. The shifting moves Africa beyond wars, conflicts, and disasters. The shifting embraces hygiene and healthcare; educational and vocational training; and entrepreneurial ventures. The shifting is a sign that a future of flourishing is possible. And, the shifting connotes a very different future to come, one far richer in human talent than the past century could imagine. By leveraging talent, Africa is better positioned to handle disruption, including the disruptive climate change looming within the planet.

Can Africa prepare for disruptive climate change?

Disruptive climate change is not a mere interruption coming in the distant future. Disruptive climate change is already alive in Africa. It brings devastation to the geography and deadly impacts on African people and wildlife. The coming decades will undoubtedly usher in unprecedented shifts and unthinkable outcomes dramatically affecting the African land, people, and wildlife. Climate destruction encircled (and continues to encircle) Africa in recent history. The cyclones of 2018 impacted individuals living in Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe; and, the threat of cyclones continues. The Indian Ocean is warming, and the warming is associated with more significant rainfall in East Africa. Because of the rain, Central Africa

experiences unparalleled moisture leading to issues of flooding. Tens of thousands of people living in the regions where the massive flooding occurs resettle to other areas; and resettlement brings its own set of challenges. All-encompassing dust storms overtake regions of the continent. And, think of the global impacts of losing the Congo Rainforest.

Africa is estimated to have only contributed 3-5% of the global greenhouse gas emissions, but Africa is feeling the brunt of the climate consequences. The disruptive climate change consequences that Africa experiences are primarily spurred on by variables outside the scope of African decisions – including both state and non-state actors. Variables include global policy adherence, state policy development, multinational corporation (MNC) decisions, behaviors of consumers, just to name a few. Within this context, can Africa prepare for further disruptive climate change by 2050? A primary distinction between Africa and other global players is the sheer level of poverty that exists. Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, finds itself in extreme poverty without the resources of foreign actors to take precautions and make preparations for climate disruption. In 2050, sub-Saharan Africa will need $50 billion each year to handle the estimated climate disruption. Yet, present poverty serves as a limiting force that impacts the options available to African leaders.

Impacts of disruptive climate change in Africa include millions of individuals starving from drought in some regions and other areas people are displaced due to flooding. People experiencing displacement face life-altering situations. Displacement welcomes the spread infections due to a lack of sanitation infrastructure, causes a reliance on camp-style temporary shelters, and obstructs access to healthcare. Displacement reduces the grazing and water offered to animals and forces farmers in disaster areas to make tough decisions such as slaughtering their source of income and nutrition. Displacement is merely one rabbit hole to travel down. Think of the carbon considerations that accompany losing the Congo Rainforest. As the second largest global rainforest system, the Congo Rainforest represents 18% of the earth's rainforests. Or, think of economic impacts that accompany the flooding due to rising sea levels of urban centers situated along the African coast.

Africa in 2050 does not have to be earmarked as a climate change dystopia. The decisions that leaders, both in Africa and globally, make now will dramatically shape the African experience in 2050. Within the continent, African leaders and governments may opt to co-create effective local solutions and teach adaptability to communities. African leaders may innovate around renewable energy production, agricultural developments, agroforestry work, and smart city urbanization. Consider the benefits that may arise from intra-continental cooperation and local entrepreneurship. As leaders seek to unlock the potential of Africa by 2050, safeguarding the continent relies heavily on the decisions and actions of current leaders.

What security benefits may arise from intra-continental cooperation in Africa?

African leaders are foundational to intra-continental cooperation. Now is the time for African leaders to create a structure that perpetuates cooperation with paradigm shifting impact. The African Union (AU) is an African institution with the ability to increase security guarantees. In 2002 the AU, consisting of 55 member states, formed in an evolutionary nature from the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Where the OAU focused on ridding Africa of decolonization and apartheid, the AU's focus is on cooperation and African driven growth.

In 2013, the organization launched a 50-year plan called *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, noting a critical aspiration to be 'a peaceful and secure Africa.' Flagship projects in the plan include a high-speed train network, a commodities strategy, African continental free trade, free movement of people, silencing of guns, e-network, virtual university, cybersecurity, and an African museum authority to preserve cultural heritage. The AU's work is critical in achieving intra-continental cooperation and associated security guarantees. But, how much of this work is achievable within the next three decades? What is a realistic expectation of progress to be made by 2050?

Security benefits accompany intra-continental cooperation. Security benefits may appear at several different levels within African society by 2050, including both people and businesses. With greater cooperation the day-in-the-life of an African may include burden-less travel in-between major African cities (think of vacation opportunities or family growth), readily available goods manufactured from other African regions in local stores, and the regular ability to consume and cook with foods and spices grown in other African regions. African businesses experience possible benefits of higher buying power in a cooperative market environment, an increased customer base due to a broader market, and opportunities to scale business operations throughout areas in Africa.

Intra-continental cooperation emphasizes peacebuilding efforts and conflict prevention strategies. Consider the potential conflicts that cooperation may reframe by 2050 to include religious confrontation, tribal disputes, ethnic conflicts, and refugee displacement. Though Africa is a central contributor within the non-integrated gap, the Sahel is a primary source of African conflict. The Sahel, a belt spanning across the northern region of Africa, is known for its instability and violence. How might intra-continental cooperation defuse the Sahel's reputation for violence come 2050? Will peacebuilding and conflict prevention strategies overturn the present corruption and kleptocracy that exists by 2050? Will the AU hold to their *Agenda 2063* plan and create an unwavering African structure?

The desire for peace, security and stability is certainly not new. Yet, over the decades, leaders have not been able to achieve cooperation among the Africa nations. Why is this? Why has peace and security not existed? As a matter of comparison, why does the AU not hold the same level of cooperation as the European Union (EU)? Why are African nations not already

cooperating with each other? When thinking towards 2050, modern leaders must ask themselves what will be different? What must be different today, tomorrow, and over the next three decades so that a peaceful and secure Africa, as the AU suggests, exists in 2050?

Cooperation reshapes the types of conflicts and security concerns that arise in 2050. With peacebuilding and conflict prevention strategies a default way of thinking within society, resources are relieved and available to combat other potential threats. Ultimately, intra-continental cooperation opens doors. Might these doors lead to non-European neo-colonialism? What about local entrepreneurship? The security guarantees that accompany intra-cooperation created through African structures drastically impact the continent's ability to unlock the potential of Africa by 2050.

What economic benefits may arise from local entrepreneurship in Africa?

In the early 2000s, the Africa Rising movement spurred the development of entrepreneurial opportunities in a contemporary way. But reflecting on the past two decades, what real momentum has come from entrepreneurship throughout the continent? What has hindered a lasting momentum and an enduring growth? Consider the impact that factionalism, tribalism, nepotism, and corruption have had on the successful long-term growth of entrepreneurship to date. Reflect on what real prosperity and development have accompanied the traditional political leadership model throughout the continent. Contemporary efforts of top-down development from African leaders over the past twenty years have not catapulted a robust existence of entrepreneurship across the general population. What can be done, starting now, so that a theme of thriving local entrepreneurship exists throughout the continent by 2050?

There is a real prospect for exponential growth related to entrepreneurial opportunities. As Africa seeks to unlock its potential by 2050, entrepreneurial ventures are essential to growth. However, an important nuance to a renewed effort involves an alternative approach. Consider the manifested impact that may arise for the African people as they adopt a bottom-up approach. How might ventures led by the African people opposed to a top-down approach from formal African leadership offer greater evolution? As systems of governmental instability, military rule, suppression, and genocide are overturned by grassroots efforts such as human rights, a growing feminist presence, educational advances, and increased networking, the continent is reshaped. Along with this evolution, entrepreneurship further opens the doors for new hope and prospects not before available to the people at large.

Transforming the continent calls for shifting values. A shift away from racism toward valuing human development. A shift away from communism and command economies toward appreciating open markets. A shift toward valuing educational and vocational programs. A shift away from poverty toward valuing a skilled workforce. A shift from destruction toward comparative progress and peace. Further, these values fuel long-term expansion and sustainability of a bottom-up form of entrepreneurship.

Local entrepreneurship lends itself to a variety of beneficial aspects for the African economy. Empowered local business owners, in turn, provide communities with sustainability, employment opportunities, internship and apprenticeship positions, and greater voice. At the same time, prosperous and meaningful local entrepreneurship disrupts historical power dynamics, contends against generational cycles of poverty, and encourages an end to the African brain drain. With the people driving the growth of local entrepreneurship, there is an exponential opportunity for higher discretionary spending throughout the economy from the bottom-up.

Another critical benefit of local entrepreneurship on the economy is its inclusive nature. Entrepreneurship is non-discriminating and can be inclusive across all geographies, industries, and cultures. Consider the economic benefits available to all sectors through local business innovations - businesses to address the infrastructure issues, climate change, oil and gas discoveries, preventative health care, urbanization, technological advances, living conditions, and agriculture, for example. Local entrepreneurship is the best hope for Africa and its people as they unlock their potential by 2050.

What benefits may arise from establishing critical infrastructure in Africa?

The past fifteen years have been marked by notable advancements in infrastructure systems throughout the continent. Yet critical infrastructure problems with energy, transportation, and water still exist for millions of Africans. Looking at the contemporary history of infrastructure investment, African governmental leaders have dedicated finances to buildout. They have also growingly accepted foreign investment (particularly from Chinese investors) to fund projects. Though foreign investment is not new and certainly not a 2020 discovery, the repercussions the African people might experience due to foreign indebtedness over the next three decades must not be overlooked.

As foreign investors continue to support infrastructure projects in Africa, at what point might the magnitude of foreign indebtedness reach a tipping point for the African people? With infrastructure projects totaling over two trillion in dollars slated for the coming years, how might funding decisions by African leaders today impact the lives of the African people in the next three decades? Do current funding decisions allow for long-term sustainability or rather burden the African people with a catastrophic debt?

Debt financed infrastructure investment is often the default standard practice. Over recent decades international investors and private equity funds have canvased infrastructure projects throughout the continent. From an international investor perspective, Africa is a haven for risky yet lucrative financial returns. Public Private Partnerships (PPP), like Africa50, is another means of infrastructure investment in which the African government works alongside the private sector. What do the African people gain from these multi-billion dollar financed endeavours? Or rather, what are the African people potentially losing in decades to come as

they are saddled with enormous debt? How do billions of dollars in debt allow for unlocking the potential of Africa by 2050?

At what point might the African people opt for a different approach to infrastructure development? At what point may a bottom-up movement from the African people overcome the top-down approach currently used by African leaders? How might a more localized, micro-development approach to infrastructure development better fuel African entrepreneurialism opposed to large-scale macro-development infrastructure projects?

Consider what a bottom-up approach to development may look like. Energy is an essential starting point. Imagine the power that accompanies capturing and creating energy locally – everything from running sanitation systems, to supporting humanitarian efforts, and even to promoting educational initiatives. As oil and gas discoveries in East Africa attract international industry, micro-grid electricity offers localized opportunities for the African people. Micro-grids for instance offer a sustainable and clean approach to fueling rural infrastructure needs throughout the continent. How might localized micro-grids impact a farm owner, a restaurant owner, or even an entrepreneur?

There is no denying that Africa is in need of infrastructure development. After decades of unsuccessful top-down to development, what benefits may arise from shifting toward a bottom-up approach? What benefits may local communities, their economies, and their entrepreneurial initiatives experience with a bottom-up approach? How might the next three decades be different than the past five decades if a bottom-up approach to infrastructure development replaces the top-down approach so prevalent throughout the continent?

As the African people are projected to hold 25% of the global talent in 2050, activating local and sustainable solutions when establishing critical infrastructure sets Africa on a new trajectory. A trajectory that empowers local entrepreneurship and leverages local talent all the while establishing critical infrastructure. How might altering the current approach to infrastructure development shift from a future of unsustainable debt toward a future of sustainability? A future where the African people are thriving and unlocking potential?

How might tribalism derail attempts for a conflict-free future?

Tribalism manifests as people make decisions out of loyalty to their group or tribe. Think of modern Africa. Consider the vastness of the continent – the Arab culture of northern Africa, the poverty throughout the sub-Saharan region, and even racial tensions in South Africa. This does not even begin to examine the magnitude of diversity and wealth of identity that is present among the 3,000 plus tribes that call Africa home. The Angolan Civil War. The Ethiopian Famine. Apartheid. Rwandan Genocide. War in Darfur. Civil conflicts spurred by groups with varying ideologies have plagued Africa historically. The divisiveness of these conflicts and the havoc the African people experience due to power moves by African leaders drastically impact the ability of the continent to unlock its potential.

What future is in store for a continent that continues the cycle of civil unrest, unrest and violence evoked by tribalism? What future may exist if tribal imbalances continue in the decades to come? What harm may come from tribal grievances continuing to perpetrate?

The legacy and continued impact of colonialism is far reaching – even in postcolonial times. Colonial powers manipulated and destroyed classic power systems of African tribes for centuries. The beliefs and systems European colonialism imposed throughout Africa have a lasting influence on indigenous groups and impact politics. Following the reign of colonialism, the latter half of the twentieth century was shaped by Western imperialism and followed by the influence of international investment. However, all throughout this history, Africa was, and is, filled with countless tribes, ideologies, and customs.

Merely focusing on tribalism is similar to focusing on the concept of diversity. There is value in diversity. There is importance on honoring cultures and customs. There is significance in hearing differing perspectives. But there is more work to be done than simply recognizing diversity. Groups and tribes must shift toward fostering inclusion and cultivating a shared vision for the grips of destructive tribalism loosen. Without this shift toward inclusion and a shared vision, tribalism in Africa will continue the cycle of violence and destruction too common in the past decades.

Tribalism represents groups with varying cultural identities, societal identities, historical narratives, political views, and power dynamics. Along with the distinctive features of each people group, there are the histories and relationships among the various groups. These relationships are shaped by varying levels of trust, tension, and power, which influence decisions. How might cultivating greater trust between groups allow for a conflict-free Africa?

When ideating ways to achieve a conflict-free future in African by 2050, tribalism is undoubtedly a factor that will influence attempts toward that future. Tribalism represents the vast diversity that exists throughout the continent. Consider the value that tribalism may bring the people as they honor the unique culture and beliefs of other groups. Image a conflict-free future when tribalism evolves beyond a focus of violence and power toward one of inclusion, shared vision, and unity.

How might non-state actors derail attempts for a conflict-free future?

As with tribalism, non-state actors are not inherently prescribed as positive or negative. Non-state actors have the opportunity to sow division or foster greater unity as Africa works toward a conflict-free future. The motives and values of non-state actors are vast and diverse – and often multi-dimensional. The discussion of non-state actors really calls into question contemporary geo-politics and proxy wars specifically.

It is important to understand the influence that non-state actors bring. What is the motive of the non-state actor? What is the strategy of the non-state actor? Why is the non-state actor involved? What is the benefit to the non-state actor for being involved? These questions are critical as non-state actors bring a real threat of proxy wars. In proxy wars, non-state actors may instigate lasting harm to already weak nations by escalating conflict, struggle, and violence. Keep in mind that many proxy wars involve various foreign state actors. And, the interconnectedness and layers of complexity in proxy wars can evolve throughout the duration of the war.

Since 2014, Libya has experienced civil war. With armed extremists along with rival tribal groups all fighting to claim power in the country, this is a prime example of a proxy war originated by non-state actors. Or, consider violence in the Sahel. Though originally the Sahel experienced more climate-induced conflict, it evolved into more extreme conflicts including militia and religious groups. Libya and the Sahel are merely two examples demonstrating the role of non-state actors in conflict.

The motivations and actions of the non-state actors in these two conflicts are generating war, unrest, and violence now. How must their motivations and actions evolve over the next three decades to ensure a conflict-free future by 2050? Is that type of evolution even possible in 30 years? Or, might the hope of a conflict-free future be too big and complex a problem to achieve?

Prevalent non-state actors include the vast number of African tribal groups, American Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and Chinese State-Owned Enterprises (SOE). Being a continent where tribal affiliations are stronger than national affiliations, non-state actors enhance the complexity of the continent. The actions and decisions of non-state actors – whether tribal groups, NGOs or SOEs for example - create avenues for greater division and strife throughout African regions. With African governments greatly influenced by tribal affiliations, non-state actors have heavy influence with national cohesion and local governments. In addition to the tribal influences, the Great Powers bring an added layer of complexity to conflicts.

Conflict is created when a non-state actor influences a party to take power from another party. Seeds are sown for growing - and cyclical - conflict through corruption, nepotism, and abuse of power. The growing violence and presence of armed groups along the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and Great Lake States is merely one example of how non-state actors exacerbate existing conflicts among African nations. Ethnic divisions, fractured relationships, and power struggles shape much of the present conflict.

Another thirty years of tribal warfare, religious rivalries, and armed groups inhabiting the area will certainly not lead to a conflict-free future – if any viable future to imagine. A continuation of groups vying for power or asserting dominance over weaker groups will not bring about a

conflict-free future. How can this cycle of conflict be broken? Is a conflict-free future even possible? If so, how might non-state actors bring unity toward a conflict-free future? If not, what will happen in the coming decades if the conflict cycle continues? The cyclical, patterned power-based conflicts will not bring about intra-continental cooperation, help foster local entrepreneurship, or allow for critical infrastructure to be established. And, without those aspects, what type of future is possible for the African people?

How might religious contention derail attempts for a conflict-free future?

The Sahel is a leading region currently experiencing religious conflict. Keep in mind, the Sahel is the belt spanning across the continent from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea in northern Africa. Within the past five years alone, religious contention has been a leading factor influencing most conflicts in the Sahel. Amid the religious disputes, the area is home to harsh desert climates, drought, food insecurity, and poverty. As climate change continues to escalate in the coming years, the trajectory for increased conflict seems inevitable. With climbing temperatures, increasing droughts, and diminishing rainfall, food insecurity compounds the instability the Sahel faces.

Though instability and violence in the Sahel are not a modern phenomenon, the situation's calibre and extremity continue to rise exponentially. Specifically, the influx in ideologically-fuelled conflicts – including armed conflict, religious violence, and religious extremists – is increasing at an alarming rate. Religious discrimination is on the rise, and discriminatory thinking certainly influences the thought of the groups initiating and prolonging, armed conflicts in the region. Marginalization. Frustration. Aggression.

Understand that, customarily, Islamists inhabited the northern portion of the Sahel with fundamentalist Christians in the southern part. With climate change progressing rapidly, food insecurity is an influencer spurring violence from militant Islamic groups. Also, realize that people living in the Sahel may fall victim to recruitment, kidnapping, or killing by Islamic extremist groups. Without immediate intervention, a future of religious warfare and the escalating violence will be the cyclical reality of the millions of Africans living in the Sahel.

The contention is not limited to interactions between opposing religions such as Islamists and Christians. Disputes are ripe within religious groups as well, consider the distinctions between Catholics and Protestants. In sub-Saharan Africa, just over 60% of Africans identify as Christian. Within this 60%, over half identify as Protestant, and roughly one-third of Christians identify as Catholic. Nuance and differences between catholic religiosity and protestant evangelical leanings demonstrate one area of growing hostility. The second area of growing hostility within Christianity is the rub between African religious interpretation with other aspects of the global Christian church. In the next three decades, as population growth in Africa expands, the African Christian church is projected to be the leader in numbers of the global Christian church, including the branches of Protestantism and Catholicism. This dynamic

further opens the door for additional religious hostilities. The African Christian church clings to more traditional and fundamental religiosity than Western religion, which leans more liberal in comparison. Consider attitude and beliefs toward the LGTBQ+ community regarding marriage equality and clergy ordination as one example.

The religious contentions that exist among African groups compounded with global religious contentions do not foster a foundation of a conflict-free future; in contrast, they do the opposite, and seemingly uphold hostilities and conflict in the continent. With these ideological and global influences at work, is it possible to have shared vision across an entire continent? What are the odds that there is buy-in on the shared vision on a conflict-free future for the African people? Is a conflict-free future merely a fleeting idea and utopian dream?

How might the African Union lead to a conflict free future?

The African Union (AU) is a leading organization actively creating strategy, plans, and initiatives to bring about a conflict free future across the continent. Following the efforts of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the 1960's, the AU formed in 2002 to foster intra-continental cooperation across 55 states. 2013 marked a critical year where African leaders came together to work towards a "Pan African Vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens, representing a dynamic force in the international arena." And, *Agenda 2063* is the manifesto that encapsulates the dream of African leaders to bring about a desirable future.

When considering Africa in 2050, the AU plays a critical role in unlocking the continent's potential. Their work through the *Agenda 2063* outlines key initiatives including practical plans for a high spread train and air transport systems, intra-continental trading plans, financial and economic institutions, cyber systems, and African-driven heritage and cultural projects. However, how much of this work is possible to be completed by 2050? How much of the AU's work will move past a sheer vision to actual implementation? How will the AU ensure the 55 states, thousands of African leaders, millions of African people will embrace the desired vision? Is the AU capable of fostering the unity needed to make *Agenda 2063* a reality?

In addition to their plan and projects outlined in *Agenda 2063*, the AU hopes to bring about specific transformations in Africa. Again, these transformations speak to the ability of the continent to unlock their potential. But, what level of transformation is possible in the next three decades? The AU's vision includes transformations of improving living standards, developing sustainable economies, fostering intra-continental systems and relationships, empowering the youth, and becoming a more peaceful continent. In the midst of disruptive climate change that is only growing in catastrophic impact across the continent, is it possible to improve African living standards? With the continued evolution of tribalism, the interference of non-state actors, and growing religious contention, is peace even an option to the continent?

We have previously explored the value of leveraging African talent, intra-continental cooperation, local entrepreneurship, and critical infrastructure. The current work and planned work from the AU's *Agenda 2063* speaks to each of these elements. However, will the AU's work prevail and overcome the disruptive systems at play in Africa? Is three decades enough time for the AU to dismantle to complex layers of existing conflict?

In reality, three decades is not enough time for any single organization to transform the workings of an entire continent. But, three decades is enough time to bring last transformation and unlock Africa's potential if organizations unite toward the shared vision. Consider the impact of the AU working toward a conflict free future alongside the Africa Rising movement, alongside nations, tribes, and the African people. With the *Agenda 2063's* aspirations, implementation plan, and transformational outcomes, the AU has already completed the complex work of creating a shared approach to bringing transformation. With the strategy in place for a couple of years now, the hurdles ahead revolve around dedication to the strategy when implementing, changing existing systems, and dismantling areas of conflict. As an African generated 50-year plan, the milestones are marked and agreed upon. We see that the question may shift from *is it possible* to unlock African potential toward *how might* African leadership ensure the strategy is implemented in a way that brings *about a conflict free future* in the next three decades.

How might bolstering the African Rising movement lead to a conflict free future?

Along with the governance work of the African Union, the grassroots, organic African Rising movement is another essential influencer in the continent's ability to embrace a conflict free future in the next three decades. The movement is centered around bringing about development across the continent. There are been a variety of expressions and beliefs that have evolved from the African Rising sentiment.

The phrase African Rising came about at the turn of the century. Through its use in media such as The Financial Times, The Economist, and BBC, African Rising became a buzzword coined to shape the narrative involving economic development and the growth of the African middle class. But, is African Rising just a term used for digital click-bait? Is the African middle class being used as a pawn by those in power? Will the African Rising movement move past a narrative used by media and leaders and bring lasting change in the coming decades?

The term African Rising sets the tone for growth and development that is essential for the middle class, economy, businesses, and entrepreneurs in African countries. By growing markets and stabilizing governments, not only does greater intra-continental opportunity open, but international prospects expand. Consider the additional foreign direct investment Africa may receive for critical infrastructure projects. Or even greater African representation within global collaborative projects that may become possible due to growth and development.

Critical to the African Rising movement is an organized group called *Africans Rising for Justice, Peace, and Dignity*. The organization was formed to impact African society. In 2016, the organization convened with nearly 300 delegates from 40+ countries represented. Individuals gathered together to create a bottom-up approach for African influence and leadership. The group already holds a shared consensus regarding their work, through *The Kilimanjaro Declaration*, to bring about a peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous future for Africa within their continent and globally. *Africans Rising for Justice, Peace, and Dignity* is already home for activists, social reformers, and leaders throughout the various aspects of African society. For instance, the group is an endorser of the #WalkTogether campaign – a campaign furthering the message of hope stemming from Nelson Mandela's work of peace building. Today the group represents over 20,000 individuals and 400 organizations as members of the collective movement including co-created events and campaigns to bring about greater justice, peace, and dignity across Africa.

The bottom-up approach fuelling the African Rising movement notably includes representation from females and younger generations which may be one of the leading factors for the movement's ability to bolster a conflict free future in the decades to come. In additional to representation of females and younger generations, another factor suggesting the movement's long-term success is the movement's presence. The movement's presence is filled with thousands of individuals throughout different facets of African society who uphold the ideals of African Rising. When considering Africa's ability to bring about a conflict free future in the next three decades, the African Rising movement may have the opportunity to be an essential player in the continent's ability to achieve that future.

Can the potential of Africa become unlocked by 2050?

As we reflect on the past 50 years of African history, we see stories of surviving – from wars to famines to diseases and everything in between. But we also see stories of rising – from entrepreneurial ventures to humanitarian efforts and more. And, as we look to the next thirty years, we can envision stories of thriving – stories of developing human talent and preparing for disruptive climate change. This continued evolution from surviving to rising to thriving can be one of the essential perspectives allowing Africa to unlock its potential by 2050.

When thinking of the next three decades there are two key drivers of change to consider. In the year 2050, Africa is expected to account for 25% of the global population. 25% of the global human talent is expected to reside in Africa, noting the critical need to ensure equitable systems of development, training, and empowerment exist for the people. All the while, the continent will face disruptive climate change that may lead to the displacement of millions of individuals and potentially exacerbating the extreme poverty that already exists throughout the continent today.

Three forces of cohesion that may help Africa unlock potential by 2050 included intra-continental cooperation, local entrepreneurship, and critical infrastructure. When thinking of establishing intra-continental cooperation consider the benefit of burden-less travel in between major Africa cities, readily available African manufactured goods throughout the continent, and even conflict prevention strategies that may reframe historical areas of conflict and violence. Expanding local entrepreneurship affords a bottom-up approach to transforming markets and economies, allows additional employment opportunities, and helps overcome generational cycles of poverty that exists. Creating critical infrastructure could allow millions of Africans the ability to access energy, transportation, and the water resources fundamental to daily living.

A conflict-free future is anything but certain for the continent by 2050. Tribalism, non-state actors, and religious contention are each potential threats to that future. As a continent representing over 3,000 tribes, shifting from cycles of civil unrest toward inclusion and inter-group trust may help efforts toward realizing a conflict-free future. Understanding the motivations and underlying actions of non-state actors such as American Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and Chinese State-Owned Enterprises (SOE) is critical in the next three decades. Proxy wars and power-based conflicts involving various non-state actions have the potential to perpetuate conflict. Religious contention mixed with harsh climates, food insecurity, and drought could further escalate ideologically-fuelled conflicts.

In contrast, there is hope for sources and influences to help bring about a conflict-free future in the coming decades. Consider the work of the African Union (AU) where African leaders together created a vision for a prosperous and peaceful Africa through the *Agenda 2063*. Key elements of the AU's vision include practical plans for a high spread train and air transport systems, intra-continental trading plans, financial and economic institutions, cyber systems, and African-driven heritage and cultural projects. Additionally, the African Rising movement speaks to a bottom-up approach representing thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations committed to growth and development for the African economy and society – including females and younger generations.

In short, the question is simple, yet the answer is complex. Can the potential of Africa become unlocked by 2050? By leveraging drivers of change, forces of cohesion, and influences of hope, in the coming decades Africa may be able to unlock its potential.

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